

South Street Seaport Museum,  
142-144 Beekman Street/211 Front Street  
(Ellen S. Auchmuty Building)  
New York City  
New York County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5674

HABS  
NY,  
31-NEWY,  
131-

PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS  
NY  
31-NEWY  
131-

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM  
142-144 BEEKMAN STREET/211 FRONT STREET  
(Ellen S. Auchmuty Building)

HABS No. NY-5674

Location: 142-144 Beekman Street/211 Front Street,  
(Formerly 128 Beekman Street),  
New York, New York County, New York.

Present Owner: Lillian Anastasio.

Present Occupant: Fulton Fish Waist (142).  
The Seaview Fish Company (144).

Present Use: Fish Waster Sorters.  
Fish purveyor.

Significance: Designed by George B. Post for Ellen S. Auchmuty, a Schermerhorn descendant, in 1885, the brick and terra cotta store is one of the handsomest buildings in the Seaport area. Terra cotta fish and shell ornamentation relate to the fish market businesses that have dominated the neighborhood since the building was constructed.

### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

#### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: A new building application (#839) was submitted on June 1, 1885. Construction commenced on July 16, 1885 and was completed on December 19, 1885.
2. Architect: George B. Post, one of the most prominent New York architects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, designed this "first class store" for Ellen S. Auchmuty. Well-respected in his own time, Post ran one of the largest and busiest architectural firms in the United States.

After Post received an engineering degree from New York University in 1858, he went to work for Richard Morris Hunt. In 1860, he left to form a partnership with Charles D. Gambrill. Later, he opened his own firm.

Some of Post's more famous buildings are the New York Times Building (1889) and the New York Stock Exchange (1904). He is probably most well-known as the designer of the earliest "elevator buildings."

3. Original and subsequent owners: The building is legally designated Block 97E, Lot 17. Information for the following chain of title comes from the New York City Conveyance Records, Surrogate's Court.

May 3, 1832

Liber 297; p. 119  
Mapes )  
Tylee ) et al  
to  
Peter and Abraham Schermerhorn  
Edward R. Jones

Nov. 22, 1834

Liber 319; p. 524  
Partition and Allotment  
Peter Schermerhorn....Lot 17

March 9, 1885

Liber 1849; p. 404  
Harriet C. Potter  
Elizabeth S. Jones  
Ellen S. Auchmuty  
Party Wall Agreement

Feb. 9, 1928

Liber 3639; p. 321; 328; 333; 338  
Long list of devisees of  
Ellen S. Auchmuty  
to  
Auchmuty Estate Inc.

April 10, 1928

Liber 3658; p. 76  
Auchmuty Estate Inc.  
to  
142-144 Beekman St. Co. Inc.

July 16, 1958

Liber 5044; p. 399  
142-144 Beekman St. Co. Inc.  
to  
James Anastasio

April 30, 1970

Liber 172; p. 575  
Aniello J. Anastasio  
(Extrs. of )  
to  
Lillian Anastasio

4. Builder: V. J. Hedden and Sons, established 1881, had a huge factory, yards and kilns located on the Passaic River, in Newark, New Jersey. In 1898 the company was characterized in the following manner: "So immense is the capacity of their works that the firm is enabled to complete any contract, regardless of size, within the time limit." (A History of Real Estate, Building and Architecture in New York City, p. 306). The firm built a large number of important buildings including the William K. Vanderbilt house on Fifth Avenue, the New York Times Building and the Plaza Hotel.

5. Original plans and construction: Since no alteration applications have been filed for the Auchmuty building since it was built in 1885, it can be assumed that the corner building appears today, aside from changes due to disrepair, as it was first constructed. Original plans have been lost by the Buildings Department but an abbreviated New Building Application #839 filed for 128 Beekman St., now 142-144 Beekman Street, appears in the New Building Docket Book of 1885. Builders V. J. Hedden & Sons constructed the five-story brick and terra cotta front "first class store" with flat tin roof for \$17,000. Upper stories rest on heavy iron piers and lintel. The most exciting elements of the building designed by Post are the playful terra cotta ornamental details relating to the fish market environment; starfish tie-rods, cockleshell cornice, and keystones sporting wriggling dolphins. Today the exterior is painted red.
- B. Historical Context: Ellen Schermerhorn Auchmuty, the first owner of the building, was a descendant of the Schermerhorn family. The Schermerhorns were a prominent New York family since the early days of the Seaport. Peter Schermerhorn built the nearby Schermerhorn Row in 1810-12.

Ellen Auchmuty was married to Richard Tylden Auchmuty, a philanthropist who had once been a partner in James Renwick's architectural firm. In 1881, the Auchmutys opened a trade school in New York City to provide an opportunity for mechanically inclined young men in poor circumstances to learn a trade.

Samuel T. Skidmore, a fish dealer, was the first occupant of the Auchmuty store. The building has always housed businesses related to the Fulton Fish Market, across the street.

Another early and long-time tenant was Western Union (listed in the Directory as St. Fulton Market). Via Western Union, fishing captains received orders to fill and telegraphed information about catches and storms to waiting wholesalers.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

See accompanying HABS photograph of the structure for a visual observation.

## PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### A. Early Views:

A ca. 1900 photograph from Select New York, Albortype Illustrations, A. Wittemann, Brooklyn, N.Y. shows a view of the Auchmuty building among other seaport buildings. From the Prints & Photographs Collection, Library of Congress (#7972).

An 1894 photograph by J. S. Johnston, entitled "View of Brooklyn Bridge from the Southwest looking to the Northeast, over the rooftops of Lower Manhattan: includes the top floor of the Auchmuty building. From the New York Historical Society.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

New York City Conveyance Records, Surrogate's Court.

New York City Tax Records, Municipal Archives, 23 Park Row.

New York City Department of Buildings, Municipal Building,  
New Building Docket Book, application #839 (1885).

Roberts, Lee and Steinke, Nancy, "Inventory of Structures in the Brooklyn Bridge S. E. Urban Renewal Area," New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, May 1968, p. 15.

Rosebrock, Ellen, "South Street Seaport Historic District," New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1974, p. 26.

George B. Post Job Record Ledger, Vol. 1 1870-1890, p. 268, New York Historical Society.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Books:

A History of Real Estate, Building & Architecture in New York City.  
New York: Arno Press, 1967, p. 306.

Johnson, Allen, ed. Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. 1.  
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943, p. 420.

Rosebrock, Ellen Fletcher. Walking Around in South Street. New York: South Street Seaport Museum, pp. 44-45.

Periodicals:

Rosebrock, Ellen Fletcher, "142 Beekman Street," South Street Reporter, Maritime Library, 205 Front St.

Schuyler, Montgomery, "Obituary of George B. Post," The Architectural Record, V. 35; January 1914, pp. 94-96.

Sturgis, Russell, "A Review of the Work of George B. Post," The Architectural Record, June 1898, Great American Architect Series, p. 7.

Weisman, Winston, "The Commercial Architecture of George B. Post," Society of Architectural Historians Journal, Vol. 31, no.3, pp. 176-203.

Prepared by: Lori Zabar  
HABS Project Historian  
Summer 1976

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The South Street Seaport project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, with the co-operation of the South Street Seaport Museum, Inc. Recording was carried out during the Summer of 1976 by Frederick W. Wiedenmann (HABS Washington, D.C. office), project supervisor; Lori Zabar (Columbia University), project historian; Robert Lee Wiltse (Louisiana State University), architect; and student architects- Barry Lee Gill (North Dakota State University), Joe E. Price (Texas Tech University), and John R. Temmink (University of Virginia). Susan McCown, a HABS historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for transmittal to the Library of Congress. Walter Smalling, Jr. of the National Park Service took the photographs of the South Street Seaport structures.